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THE THANKSGIVING TURKEY, 1938 MODEL

A radio conversation between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, Mr. H. L. Shrader, Bureau of Animal Industry, Mr. E. J. Rowell, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Office of Information, broadcast Monday, November 21, 1938, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home program, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 93 associate radio stations.

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WALLACE KADDERLY:

And it's too bad, Everett Mitchell, that you and the Homesteaders there in Chicago can't journey eastward also right now. But maybe it's just as well -- for us. We've got only one turkey ready to be carved here. But it's about as near perfection as a sample of scientific turkey raising and turkey cooking as anything I ever saw.

But before Loy Shrader here gets his carving knife into action, I want to say just two or three words about this annual turkey event here in Washington. It's practically a tradition with us now. We look forward to it all through the year, not just as a good time. It gives us a chance to report in a very informal way what the Department of Agriculture is doing for turkey producers and turkey consumers.

So once again Ruth Van Deman is here to give the latest word of the scientific cooks on roasting turkey.

E. J. (Mike) Rowell probably has a few words to put in about the state of the turkey market. That right, Mike?

E. J. (MIKE) ROWELL:

Right, if there's time.

KADDERLY:

And, Shrader, I hope it won't bother you to talk as you carve.

H. L. SHRADER:

If it does, I'll turn the knife over to you ---

KADDERLY:

No, no, I didn't mean that. I just wanted to make sure you wouldn't forget to tell us about what the poultry people are doing to develop there new streamline birds, to fit modern appetites.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

And modern ovens.

KADDERLY:

Yes, I suppose that's pretty important -- to get a turkey the right size for the home oven.

VAN DEMAN:

You'd know, if you ever tried to squeeze an 18-pounder into a kitchenette stove.

KADDERLY:

Well, I want to know before we get any further along here, how you got this roast turkey out of an oven and up here, all hot and steaming like this. It looks as though it had just come off the fire.

VAN DEMAN:

It did -- about 15 or 20 minutes ago. See, there's the roaster over there in the corner.

SHRADER:

All a matter of timing.

VAN DEMAN:

And rapid transportation. And 100 percent cooperation. Mr. Shrader's being modest. He brought this turkey up from the experimental kitchen in his car. And Lucy Alexander did the roasting. She was down there in the kitchen at the crack of dawn this morning getting it stuffed and into the oven ---

ROWELL:

Well, it sure is a superb job.

SHRADER:

(Whetting his knife)

KADDERLY:

That's right, Shrader, be sure that knife's good and sharp.

SHRADER:

If this bird's like some of the others we've been getting from the farm, it's probably tender enough to cut with any knife. I'll just get this fork stuck in here across the breastbone. That anchors the bird down. So you won't have turkey in your lap, Miss Van Deman.

VAN DEMAN:

I'm not the least bit worried. I've watched you carve too many turkeys in the laboratory. I haven't seen you make a single false move yet with that knife.

ROGERS:

Maybe he's never carved a turkey on the air before.

SHRADER:

You're right, I never have.

KADDERLY:

Do you stand or sit when you carve?

SHRADER:

I like to stand. And I turn the platter this way, with the legs of the bird toward me.

KADDERLY:

I generally carve sitting down. And I have the bird broadside to me and go at it with my knife -- so.

SHRADER:

That's easy for you with your long arms.

ROWELL:

That's my method too.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, you all start, don't you, by slicing the leg off first?

SHRADER:

Yes. And I take hold of the end of the drumstick, right here. I hope that isn't bad manners.

VAN DEMAN:

Very good sense, it seems to me.

SHRADER:

Then when I cut the skin here -- like this -- between the thigh and the body of the bird, I give a little twist on that thigh joint.

ROWELL:

Boy, that's so tender it falls right over ---

ROGERS:

And look at the juice run.

VAN DEMAN:

That's a sign of perfect cooking.

SHRADER:

And of a fine, well-finished young bird. This young tom I believe weighed between 12 and 13 pounds.

ROWELL:

Market weight?

SHRADER:

Yes, head and feet on, picked but not drawn. Now, I don't know about you fellows, but I generally shift this leg section over like this to a separate plate --- or onto the edge of a big platter -- and cut right down through this second joint. Generally there's somebody around the table who wants a drumstick.

KADDERLY:

If the tendons have been pulled out, you can slice it up and serve it with the dark meat.

SHRADER:

Yes, I sometimes do that. And this thigh, I slice off the bone -- like this -- into nice strips of dark meat.

ROWELL:

(Aside.) Wallace, are you going to be able to hold yourself in until this demonstration's over?

KADDERLY:

I'm not sure.

ROGERS:

I'm very sure, I'm not.

SHRADER:

Now that's done. I'll take off the wing. And I've learned something here about a turkey's anatomy that's quite useful. That wing joint isn't where it looks to be.

ROWELL:

I always have the dickens of a time hitting that.

SHRADER:

Look here. Here's the trick. Don't cut where the wing seems to join the body of the bird. Cut here - an inch higher, over toward the breast. And turn the blade of your knife at a 45 degree angle --- see, that strikes it perfectly.

KADDERLY:

Very neat.

ROWELL:

Have a wing, Miss Van Deman?

VAN DEMAN:

No, thank you, I'll wait for some of that white meat from the breast.

SHRADER:

And the oyster. I know what you really want.

ROWELL:

The oyster, I'll say. That's the choicest morsel in the whole turkey.

SHRADER:

There're two of 'em, you know. Here's the oyster on this side, right down here in this hollow of the back, below the hip joint.

VAN DEMAN:

Just leave that oyster there for future reference. I'm anxious to see how that breast carves. Some of these streamline turkeys have such grand thick breast meat that Lucy's had a hard time cooking it done.

KADDERLY:

Generally the breast of a turkey is rather dry.

VAN DEMAN:

Not if you use a slow oven, and keep basting.

ROWELL:

Look at what Shrader's got here! I never saw white meat of turkey slice better than that.

ROGERS:

Just peels off.

KADDERLY:

You've got just the proper little sawing motion in your wrist there, Shrader.

VAN DEMAN:

Didn't I tell you he was a professional carver?

SHRADER:

Don't get me rattled. I might be like that bride whose husband said he didn't know how to carve. When she bought the bird at the store, they showed her a chart with dotted lines, showing just where to carve. But when her bird was delivered, she waltzed right back to that store to tell 'em that they ^{had} forgotten to put the dotted lines on her bird.

ROGERS:

(Carve on the dotted line -- good enough.)

SHRADER:

Well it does help if you know your joints.

KADDERLY:

You're certainly not striking any joints in that breast.

SHRADER:

No, this is pretty straight sailing. On some of these experimental birds from the farm we've had breasts 3 to 4 inches thick. A broad keel and a thick well-fleshed breast are two of the things we're breeding for. And notice how much shorter these leg bones are. You see this bird's built rather small and blocky. It doesn't have that rangy, gangling look that you sometimes see in turkeys.

ROGERS:

Pardon me. I don't want to seem brash here, but don't you think it's about time we tried the flavor of this bird.

SHRADER:

Sure, sure, help yourself. And let me give you some of the stuffing.

VAN DEMAN:

A spoonful of stuffing, --- a slice of dark meat, --- a slice of white meat. That's a pretty good start.

ROWELL:

Where's the turkey gravy?

VAN DEMAN:

In a jar over there in the corner. I'm afraid you'll have to wait for that though.

ROWELL:

Won't it get cold?

VAN DEMAN:

No, it's all wrapped up in papers, keeping hot.

ROGERS:

This is wonderful stuffing.

VAN DEMAN:

You like a dry stuffing then?

ROGERS:

If this is dry stuffing, I do.

VAN DEMAN:

That's just breadcrumbs mixed with melted butter and some of the turkey fat, tried out. And seasoned with chopped celery ---

ROGERS:

I thought I tasted celery.

VAN DEMAN:

And a little onion and chopped parsley, and thyme and savory.

ROGERS:

What? No sage?

VAN DEMAN:

No, but that's just a matter of personal taste like the stuffing. Some like it moist. Some like it dry. We happen to be of the school that thinks sage is a rather strong flavor to go with turkey. It's likely to mask that delicate turkey flavor.

KADDERLY:

This bird certainly has real turkey flavor. And the meat's so juicy. Ruth, is that what you said the slow cooking did for it?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, it's just the same as cooking any kind of meat. Moderate heat lets the natural juices stay in. The slow even penetration of heat doesn't shrink the meat and make it give up its juice the way a very hot oven does. Now, this turkey for instance. As Mr. Shrader said a moment ago, it weighed nearly 13 pounds, dressed weight.

SHRADER:

That is before it was drawn.

VAN DEMAN:

That's right. Just as you generally have to pay for it in the market. This 13 pounder went into the oven just about 9:00 o'clock this morning. And it was done, ready to bring up here in 3 hours and a quarter. The oven was 300 degrees all the time the turkey was roasting. I think that figures out about 15 minutes to the pound on the weight of the whole bird, undrawn.

KADDERLY:

Three and a quarter divided by 13, yes, that's just about 15 minutes to the pound of turkey.

VAN DEMAN:

About every half hour or so, the oven was opened and the turkey taken out, and turned, and basted with the drippings in the bottom of the pan and some extra melted butter. But no water. No cover on the pan. Nothing to make a lot of steam circulate around the turkey and draw out juice.

ROGERS:

I should think steam would keep in juice.

VAN DEMAN:

No, Mr. Rogers, we'll have to invite you down to our laboratory some day, for a practical demonstration.

ROGERS:

It's even better when you bring the demonstration up here, like this.

KADDERLY:

Well, Ruth, Mr. Shrader's got this oyster all carved out waiting for you.

SHRADER:

Yes, you know there's an old saying that the carver's either a saint or a knave, depending on what he does with the oyster from the turkey.

KADDERLY:

Well, as you said a moment ago, every turkey has two oysters. Mike, keep an eye on that other one.

SHRADER:

That's right, it's hard to be more than half a saint.

ROWELL:

Well, any way you're a most expert carver. Thanks for this lesson in how it should be done.

SHRADER:

Oh, I'm just very much of an amateur. Anybody can get along all right carving a turkey. If he has his knife good and sharp. If he can hold his left hand steady while his right hand works and knows where to find the joints in the bird.

VAN DEMAN:

And if the bird's roasted right.

SHRADER:

And if it's served on a big enough platter without a lot of fancy greenery all around it to fall off on the tablecloth and draw a frown from the lady at the head of the table.

VAN DEMAN:

She hasn't any right to frown. It's her fault if she doesn't leave a safety zone all around the edge of the platter, and hold her garnish down to a few sprigs of parsley. Just enough green to set off the golden brown skin of the turkey.

KADDERLY:

Well said, Ruth. We'll make you the president of the Society for the Limitation of Garnishes on Turkey Platters.

VAN DEMAN:

I accept, with pleasure.

KADDERLY:

And I hope you and Loy Shrader here will also accept our thanks for this great demonstration of turkey cooking and turkey carving.

ROWELL:

May I ditto that, Wallace?

ROGERS:

And I'd like to do the same.

VAN DEMAN:

The thanks for the cooking belong to Lucy Alexander. I'll take them back to her.

KADDERLY:

By the way doesn't she have a recipe all worked out for roasting turkey with this moderate oven control. I was thinking some of our listeners might like to have that.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, but I'm afraid it's too late now to get it through the mail before Thanksgiving. We do have the recipe though for stuffing and roasting turkey.

KADDERLY:

It would still be good at Christmas.

VAN DEMAN:

Oh yes. It's good any time.

KADDERLY:

Then I'm going to loose an avalanche of requests on you, Ruth. I'm going to make that a definite offer. If anybody who's heard our "turkey talk" here wants the Bureau of Home Economics recipe for roasting turkey the new scientific way, just send Ruth Van Deman a card. All you need to ask for is Recipe for roasting turkey. Address your card to the Bureau of Home Economics, Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. And Miss Van Deman will see that the recipe gets to you in plenty of time to use on your Christmas turkey, if not for your Thanksgiving bird.